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LIFE AT THE LEES

X 107



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Book 1011

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# LIFE AT THE LEES

Poets sing of life at the lees  
In tender verses and delicate:  
Of tears and manifold agonies —  
Little they know of what they prate.  
Out of this silence, passionate  
Sounds a deeper, a wilder chord.  
If a song be heard through the close-barred gate.  
Have pity on these my comrades, Lord!

HARD LABOR.

By X107



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To

A. H.

in recognition.



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## FOREWORD



## FOREWORD

*These verses are the cry of a soul jailed in its body.*

*The Body, X107, knew the barred door, the prison dress, the physical humiliations of the cell, the rage against a society forced thus to protect itself.*

*But the Soul, looking through the eyes of its jailer, the Body, saw the stars; it felt the winds blowing over fields of blossoming grass; it heard the lap of moon-led waters, and the laughter of little children.*

*Which was the real woman — the Body or the Soul; the Body, which found its level in the gutter, or the Soul, rejoicing in beauty and goodness? Who can say!*

*But there is one thing we can say,— we who feel the tragic contradiction of the singer and her song. We can confess that our way of punishing the body*

*may, and often does, destroy the soul. In this little book the soul of X107, in spite of us and our blunders and cruelties, is yet alive, and sings.*

*These verses are published as they were written, without any attempt at editing. The brief extracts from letters, chosen at random, are included with the consent of the author. They give a glimpse of later life and personality.*

LORIN F. DELAND.

## IN PRISON

These are pawns that the hand of Fate  
Careless sweeps from the checkerboard.  
Thou that know'st if the game be straight,  
Have pity on these my comrades, Lord!

HARD LABOR.





## AN EVENING PRAYER

DEAR God, another day is done,  
And I have seen the golden sun  
Swing in the arch from east to west,  
And sink behind the pines to rest.  
Now night comes creeping, velvet-shod,  
And I would give Thee thanks, dear God,  
That Thou hast been with me today,  
And helped me o'er the stony way.  
I thank Thee that Thou gavest me  
The power of sight; that I may see  
The tinted glories of thy skies,  
An earthly glimpse of Paradise:  
The power to hear the evening breeze  
Swelling in organ harmonies:  
The power to feel the tender grasp  
Of loving hands in friendship's clasp:  
The power to breathe the sweet perfume  
Of dainty tea rose in its bloom:  
To taste the fruit, which Thou didst bless,  
Like manna in the Wilderness.  
I thank Thee for these gifts to me,

But one thing more I ask of Thee:  
From out thy bounteous, gracious hand,  
Give me the power to understand,  
To understand — to sympathize —  
To note the pain in others' eyes;  
To have the power to rightly read  
The kindly motive of each deed.  
And this I humbly ask of Thee,  
Because I know Thou lovest me.

## THE DREAM

WHILE on my pillow Care did brood,  
I, friendless, laid me down and dreamed  
That where the pale cold moonlight streamed  
A spirit in my chamber stood.

Her face was pure, divine and mild,  
With that sweet look, surpassing fair,  
Such as all true born mothers wear  
When gazing at a well-loved child.

She glided by and from my shelf  
Took down my little book of rhyme  
Wherein I tried from time to time  
To bring to life my hidden self.

And at her touch it seemed to me,  
The thoughts that my poor words concealed,  
Sprang into life, and stood revealed  
As I had meant that they should be.

She closed the book. In ecstasy  
I felt her eyes upon me turn;  
And for her touch my heart did yearn;  
The spirit's name was Sympathy.

I woke. Dull care was still with me,  
"Go search" he said, "in other lands,  
And find the heart that understands,  
And there you'll find sweet Sympathy."

## CONSOLATION

WHEN the heart was young and the  
eyes were bright,  
She gazed at the starry dome of night  
And said, "This world is a beautiful place  
And God is the King of a noble race,  
And I know some day I shall see His face,"  
For the heart was young, and the eyes were  
bright.

When the heart was young, and the blood  
was red,  
The tempter came and softly said:  
"Oh! come with me, where the gay lights  
swing,  
There are none of us born, but must have our  
fling,"  
And youth at its best is a fleeting thing,  
When the heart is young, and the blood is red.

When the heart was young, and the blood  
    ran fast,  
The throb of the city lured at last,  
Where they sin by night, and they sin by day,  
And the golden idols turn to clay,  
And a battered soul is the price they pay,  
When the heart is young, and the blood runs  
    fast.

And the heart was scarred, and the eyes were  
    dim,  
And soul and body grew sick with sin,  
And her eyes were scorched with the bitter  
    tears  
She shed for the sinful waste of years,  
And the hopes ran low, through doubts and  
    fears,  
When the heart was scarred, and the eyes  
    were dim.

And the heart grew cold, and the way seemed  
    drear,  
When there came a voice to her listening ear:  
"Although my mandates you have denied,  
'Twas for such as you that I lived and died,  
'Twas for such as you I was crucified  
When hearts were cold, and the way seemed  
    drear."

And the heart was calmed, and the way grew  
fair

And she breathed a humble penitent prayer,  
And back from their sinful sleeping spell  
Came the same ideals in her heart to dwell  
That had drawn her back from the mouth of  
hell,

And the heart was calm and the way grew fair.

And the heart grew young, and the eyes grew  
bright,

When again she gazed at the dome of night,  
And said, "Oh world! I have known disgrace,  
Still up beyond I may find a place,  
For the penitent thief saw the Master's face:"  
And the heart was young and the eyes were  
bright.

## THE CONTRAST

*Then —*

THE God of a Christian people  
Looked down on a Christian land,  
And saw in a prison court-yard  
A cowering woman stand.  
The whip, from the hand of the jailer,  
Fell with a sickening thud  
Across the back of the victim,  
Dyed red with her crimson blood.

And the Watcher's heart was troubled,  
His eyes o'ershadowed with pain,  
And he murmured "Oh my Father,  
Have I suffered for such in vain?"  
Then he bade his garden angel  
Pluck souls, just ready for birth,  
And filling them with his pity,  
Sent them down here to the earth.

*Now —*

The God of a Christian people  
Looked down on a Christian land,  
And there in a fair green country  
Saw another Prison stand.  
'Twas ruled by the hand of mercy,  
And soothed was the heart's unrest,  
And body and soul were cared for  
While search was made for the best.

They breathed the air of the heavens,  
They worshipped, they worked, they played,  
And hands were eager to guide them,  
Lest from Christ's pathway they strayed.  
And the Watcher's heart grew joyful,  
Sweet peace illumined his face,  
For souls he had plucked in Heaven  
Had each found its rightful place.

\* \* \* \*

And oft on a summer's evening  
Praises are flung to the breeze,  
Sung by His wayward children,  
Under the mulberry trees.

## THE DEVIL'S OWN TIME

THERE was laughter gay, as they rode  
away  
From the place where they wined and dined;  
And the car held four, but there rode one more  
For the devil was perched behind.  
And the road they took had an eerie look  
As it wound by the cliff's tall height,  
And below like ink, curled the river's brink  
Like a wriggling snake in the night.

And one was a girl, whom the city's whirl  
Had changed to a woman so bold,  
And one bore the trace of a lovely face,  
And a heart with the greed of gold.  
And the men were two of the men who view  
Every woman with vulture's eyes;  
They were men of ease, and in such as these  
Finds the devil his best disguise.

And the moon shone cold on a flask of gold,  
As they passed it from hand to hand;  
And they took warm sips from each other's lips,  
When the wine their passion had fanned.  
They sang a song, but the words went wrong,  
So they sang of the skies above,  
And they sang of the charms of a lover's arms,  
And they sang of their wanton love.

And it seemed a joke when the skid-chain  
broke,  
And the car did a drunken reel;  
And they laughed with glee for they could not  
see  
The devil was guiding the wheel.  
Then out in the night rang a cry of fright,  
And the car like a thing possessed  
Leaped over the edge of the cliff's high ledge  
And sank in the black river's breast.

And the moonlight flashed, and the water  
dashed  
Its spray 'gainst the cliff's grey stone,  
And down with the dead, in the river's bed,  
The devil was counting his own.  
And a farmer's lad, (folks say he was mad)  
Who passed in the early morn,  
Heard the weirdest noise, where the curlews  
poise,  
'Twas the devil tooting the horn.

(To ———, on her Birthday.)

### THE WORD FOR THE DEED

DEAR lady, on thy natal day,  
Amid your gifts so grand and gay,  
Pray listen to this roundelay  
From me, a sad bad poet.

I would that I could dedicate  
To you, a poem, oh so great,  
That Shakespeare would seem second rate;  
And all the world should know it.

But woe is me! My Muse has flown  
And left me, poemless, alone.  
She went to regions quite unknown,  
As fast as she could go it.

Nor can I buy you candy sweet,  
Nor purchase a swell opera seat,  
I cannot buy you fruit to eat,  
And I am sadly harassed.

I cannot buy sweet flowers of spring  
I cannot buy a blessed thing!  
I am, like all the bards who sing,  
Financially embarrassed!

## POSTPONED

(With apologies to G. K. Chesterton.)

I PLANNED from off my window ledge  
To leap to death, and be no more;  
But it has just occurred to me  
That I live on the cold first floor.  
Postponed must be my suicide,  
And I must seek another way;  
Then, too, there is a show tonight!  
I shall not kill myself today.

I hear the story that for months  
I've followed in a magazine,  
In the next number quickly ends,  
To miss it would be quite too mean.  
They say some day,— in fact next week,  
Our board will festive be and gay:  
The sun feels good — I've changed my mind;  
I shall not kill myself today.

## ROMANCE AND REALITY

DAPHNE, let us hand in hand,  
Visit that enchanted land  
Where the Nile in grandeur flows,  
Where the stately palm tree grows;  
Where the maids of old Japan  
Flirt behind a painted fan;  
Where Niagara throws her veil  
Diamond decked, the sun to hail;  
Where they dance, 'mid merry scenes,  
To the sound of tambourines;  
Daphne, let us ———Rhymes are tame!  
What say to the movies, Mame?

## CONSCIENCE

WHEN the owlet hoots, and the black  
    night creeps,  
And the great house, wrapped in its shadow,  
    sleeps;  
When the bell tolls two in a muffled chime,  
As it counts the steps of the flight of Time,  
The rich man wakes, and he seems to feel  
An icy breath, through his chamber steal,  
And sees, in the depths of his easy chair,  
His nightly visitor seated there.

The head's proud poise, and the turn of the  
    arm,  
And the look in the face that bodes him harm,  
As familiar seem, in the shadows dim,  
As his mirrored face, when it smiles at him.  
But his brain is numbed, 'neath the night's  
    dark spell,  
And the phantom's name he cannot tell.

Yet it casts on him an unearthly stare,  
As it calmly lolls in his easy chair,  
Till the rich man's brow is wet with dew,  
And he hoarsely whispers, "Who are you?"  
Then the phantom laughs, "What, awake  
at last?

I have been with you for an hour past,  
If you look again, you will plainly see  
That I am the one that you used to be.

"I know in your heart that you thought me  
dead:

But I walk with you, quite unseen, instead:  
And I watch you read, where the poet sings,  
How a man can step to the highest things:  
And you seem to think you can do the same,  
So you lead a life, that is dull and tame;  
But I think, my friend, 'tis a wild sweet  
dream,

For you left *me* out of your little scheme.  
So lest you forget, and should count me dead,  
I shall come each night to your lonely bed,  
When the owlet hoots, and the clock strikes  
two,  
And tell you the things that you used to do.

"How your love for gold made you mean as  
dirt,  
How you never cared for another's hurt,

How you ploughed your way, just to gain  
your ends,  
O'er the bleeding hearts of your dearest  
friends,  
How you told a maid you would love for aye.  
Then you cast her off, when you had your way:  
And lest cold remorse in your soul should sink,  
You filled your veins with the demon Drink!  
You robbed the needy, you cursed the poor,  
And you drove the hungry from out your door.  
And these are the things, I shall tell to you,  
When the black night creeps, and the clock  
strikes two.

"I shall come at night and shall have my way,  
For I am a part of the price you pay:  
You will toss and turn, you will sigh and groan,  
And send up prayers to the Great White  
Throne;  
And blush in the dark, though none can see,  
When you think of the thing that you used  
to be."

When the owlet hoots, and the black night  
creeps  
And the great house, wrapped in its shadow,  
sleeps,  
The rich man wakes at the hour of two,  
To hear of the things that he used to do.

## TO YOU, PIERETTE

FAREWELL, Pierette,  
The fleeting hours  
I spent with you,  
Are faded flowers.  
No more you dance  
To lilting lay  
Of silver pipes  
Till break of day.  
You leave the throng,  
I linger yet,  
Neath ash of death  
I smile, Pierette!  
Across the stretch  
Of Memory's lands,  
My eyes seek yours,  
And hands seek hands.  
I smile, because  
I must not weep.  
I wear the mask,  
I sow, I reap.

On with the dance!  
I would forget  
I am Pierot,  
You were Pierette.

## TO MY FRIEND

### I

**M**Y soul was sick with bitter strife,  
I hated man and hated life.

I feared to think of coming years,  
The world was gray through mists of tears.

I cried aloud, I was bereft;  
I knew that only God was left.

I cried to Him, "Oh succour me!"  
And then, dear friend, He sent me thee.

### II

I crept to my room, and I closed my door,  
And I fell on my knees by the narrow bed,  
And I lifted my face to God and said,  
"You have sent me a friend, I can ask no  
more."

*(Written to another prisoner on her birthday.)*

### YOU AND I

WE have met, you and I,  
Like stray birds in the night,  
Whose wings gently touch  
In their wind-driven flight.  
So together we drift  
Till the morning's first rays  
Show to each her own path,  
And the parting of ways.

We must part, you and I,  
When our course is made clear.  
Though the time has been brief,  
The companionship dear.  
Though new voices I hear  
And new faces I see,  
They shall never erase  
Fond remembrance of thee.

Shall we meet, you and I,  
Ere our life's sands are run?  
We must leave that to Him,  
The Omnipotent One.

All I ask, all I pray,  
In the darkness of night,  
He will guide you and me  
In the path that is right.

## APRIL WEATHER

I SAID, in the night, I shall smile no more,  
For my grief seemed deep, and my heart  
was sore;  
But I woke when the sun caressed my lips,  
And I tingled down to my finger tips.  
So I sang, instead, a lilting lay  
To an April sky on an April day.

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

HOW fast the years swing round, my  
friend,

How fast the years swing round!  
Accomplished hopes and conquered fears,  
Unkept resolves and bitter tears,  
Are blazed along the trail of years;  
How fast the years swing round!

How brief from birth to death, my friend,  
How brief from birth to death!  
Like some strange dream, now sad, now  
sweet,  
Wherein the bad and good compete,  
We taste of joy, we know defeat;  
How brief from birth to death!

Oh, may your years be sweet, my friend,  
Oh, may your years be sweet!  
The trail you blaze, a marking place  
Of victories won in Life's hard race,  
And then — at last — the Savior's face.  
Oh, may your years be sweet!

## LEST I FALL

**W**HEN heavy rests Thy hand on me,  
When sorrow doth my brow enwreath,  
Oh, let me not forget, dear God,  
Thy stronger hand rests underneath

## TO MY MOTHER

**D**AUGHTER of men who left the snug  
    harbors,  
To court wild adventure and conquer the  
    waves;  
Whose Bible and chart were their sure guide  
    to heaven,  
Who smilingly went to their sea-weed decked  
    graves.

You have your compass. The Bible your  
    chart is;  
Snug is your harbor; you watch from the  
    shore  
Another one, sailing on Life's stormy ocean,  
Asteep with adventure, athirsty for lore.

Would that my course could be laid as you  
    wish it;  
Would that your harbor could bring both  
    content;  
Mine is a craft that was fashioned for waters  
Where circles the whirlpool on treachery bent.

Grieve not, I beg you, though still I am  
drifting,  
Blame not yourself for a strange craft like  
mine,  
Drawn were the plans of it back in the ages,  
Yet all of the good, dear, within it is thine.

## ON PAROLE

As I leap forth  
Into a strange, kind world, a moment halt  
My footsteps; and the chance which makes my worth  
I weigh with that mischance they call my fault.

HARD LABOR.



## SPRING IN THE CITY

**O**H! Spring in the city! It sets my heart  
beating!

It goes to my head like the tang of the sea!

When down the wet pavements, young March  
flings her greeting,

With wild, whistled songs full of hoydenish  
glee.

Oh blue is her bonnet, with plumes soft and  
cloudy!

And gray is her gown with a silvery sheen,

And through the long rent, where she tore it,  
the rowdy,

Peeps out her bright petticoat, emerald green.

She skips through the Common, the winds  
follow after,

Now coaxing, beguiling, wherever she goes:

And up to the bishop she dances with laughter,

And knocks his staid head-gear atilt on his  
nose.

Her cry-baby sister has loaned her the flowers  
That drop from her gown in her wild, merry  
    race;  
The violet and crocus, from April's own  
    bowers,  
She saucily tosses in mother Earth's face.

Oh! Spring in the city! It sets my heart  
    beating!  
It goes to my head like a draught of old wine:  
Stay, March, I implore you! Oh, be not so  
    fleeting,  
For, witch that you are, you are wholly  
    divine!

## THE TWO LOVES

NIGHT dew falling — Night birds calling —  
Mr. Jack O'Lantern Moon a'hanging in  
a tree:

Breezes vagrant — Odors fragrant —  
Come out, little lady love, and meet the night  
with me.

Violets sleeping — Sharp eyes peeping —  
Eyes of little living things that love the night  
hours well:

Birds are mating — I am waiting  
Underneath your window, dear, my Spring-  
time love to tell.

Green buds blowing — Bright stars glowing —  
Do not think me fickle when I say that I  
love two:

Life is rounded — Joy unbounded —  
When 'neath open skies, I greet sweet Lady  
Spring and you.

## FORGIVE

DID'ST see me on the yesterday,  
When meadoward we took our way,  
Strike at the hand that lifted up  
To my parched lips, life's brimming cup?  
Did'st see me then I say?

And seeing, did'st thou veil thine eyes,  
Filled with a saddened, pained surprise?  
Or was it planned that such as I  
Must know a thousand deaths? Then die  
Ere I have grasped the prize?

Did'st see me on the yesternight  
When sickened soul was black with blight?  
Dread quivers of despairing shame  
Scorched my poor body like a flame.  
Did'st see me then — at night?

Upon my heart a little ring  
Of whitened scars, that burn and sting,  
Remind me that I struck the hand  
That led me to a promised land.  
How long doth Memory cling?

## MY SONG

**I** CANNOT help but sing, I said,  
For joy hath lately found me!  
When friendly stars shine overhead,  
I cannot help but sing, I said:  
Would'st have me weep? The past is dead,  
And kindly friends surround me.  
I cannot help but sing, I said,  
For joy hath lately found me!

## IF SUCH LOVE CAME

**I**F Love should come to me some day,  
And I should sadly to him say,  
Before he pressed his first warm kiss,  
I have done this, and this, and this,  
Confessing sins of human clay;  
And he should coldly turn away:—  
I would not sigh, nor weep, nor moan,  
Nor worship Grief on purple throne;  
But rather would I softly say,  
If Love should come to me, some day, —  
“’Tis better so. Adieu, — we part!  
This thing you nurtured in your heart  
Was never Love; for Love forgives,  
And understands, forbears, and lives!”  
And gladly would I go my way,  
If such Love came to me some day.

## LOVE'S TOKEN

I BURIED Love, and softly laid  
My hopes away, 'neath sylvan shade,  
For I was sore beset.

I watered it with bitter tears  
That flowed from thoughts of other years  
That I would fain forget.

But when there dawned another day,  
From where my Love neglected lay,  
There sprang a violet.

## WHY?

SWEPT in by the tide, and cast on Life's  
bosom,  
Unwanted, uncalled for, an atom of chance;  
Groping and cursed by the sins of another,  
Hopelessly watching the grey years advance.

Swept on by the tide, in its merciless surging,  
Battered and lashed by black Poverty's wave  
A plaything of Fate, by Fate ill-begotten,  
Wind driven derelict, marked for the grave.

Swept out by the tide to the land of surmises;  
Questions unanswered, naught learned but  
a cry;  
Crushed by the strife of an unsought existence;  
Back to the Nowhere, murmuring "Why?"

# FREEDOM

Free, I said, free!  
And fate comes behind and scourges me.  
HARD LABOR.



## EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

I went to the new situation last night at the . . . . . Besides the work of cashier, I am to do all the bookkeeping, keep the registry, attend to sixty-five mail boxes, do the post office business, and take care of three public telephones. Although the work was intricate, I handled it all right. I was told that there was no time allowed for dinner during the eight hours' work, but that in place of dinner the boy would give me an egg drink from the soda fountain. I am to work also on Sundays and holidays—without extra pay of course. I don't mind the hard work, but, frankly, the atmosphere of the whole place was not at all to my liking. By the time I had my cash balanced it was nearly one o'clock in the morning. The proprietor's father, a dissolute-looking old man, with baggy eyes, and who looked like pictures of General Butler, winked at me every time his son's back was turned, and even gave my arm a very fatherly pressure when he let me out of the side door after work. Pleasant, wasn't it?

I have to use my own instincts about these

places, I suppose; but don't for a moment think that I am afraid of the hard work when I say that I would rather not stay here. Do you think that I am rash, and am throwing away a possible chance? You know I think a good deal of your opinion on the subject.

\* \* \* \*

When I think sometimes that my identity may be discovered, I turn sick with fear. It is a dreadful secret to carry around. R . . . . , whom I knew five years ago, wonders at the improvement in me, in speech as well as looks, and is so interested in my verses that I am immensely flattered. Anyhow, thanks to you, I find myself picking much wiser associates, and I think they will be my salvation. I am still out of work, but I am helping out in a lunch room from eleven to half past three, which keeps the proverbial wolf from coming to life. This is only temporary, but I think I am lucky, for it means one square meal a day at least.

Oh, such a crowded, lonesome city! It is a very dangerous thing to be unemployed where there are lights and laughter and music, and one is alone. It has given me a good idea for a magazine story, but it is so hot in my "two by four" that I can't write. I will

get along somehow, and if looking will bring me work, I shall get it surely.

I am reading *Science and Health*, and find the principle very fine. One must believe in the principle, and not in the personality of anyone connected with it. Were it not so, I would have nothing to do with it. It is really helping me.

I read in the paper that . . . . . has been arrested for shop-lifting. That poor, foolish girl! Only twenty-one years old, to ruin herself again for the sake of pretty clothes! I love pretty clothes, too, and hate to look as if I came out of the ark, as badly as anyone I know of; and I know it must have been a great temptation. But, oh, what a price she paid for them!

\* \* \* \*

I am very joyous this evening. I have had a great treat in the form of a letter from . . . . .  
. . . . . Her letter is always like a little white posy to me. For the last three years I have saved them very carefully, until now I have a beautiful boquet. Her kindness in writing to me is one of the bright spots in this navy blue life. It makes me think of a day when I had been in prison only a few weeks, and I was down on my knees scrubbing

my part of a long hall. I had been locked for some time in a cell with a dark window, and so any occupation was welcome. We were not allowed to look up at any one who passed through the hall, and an officer stood at the end of the corridor watching us. My back was aching, my wrists were sore, my knees throbbed from the unaccustomed position, and I was so filled with rage at my humiliation that I longed to knock the bucket of dirty water over, and then roll in it and scream and yell for sheer relief,—when some one tapped me on the shoulder. I looked up with fear, for I thought I was going to be reprimanded, but instead a woman bent over me and handed me one small flower; and when she smiled I could have kissed her feet, and I felt all the anger die away, and my throat ached, it was so full. It was as if I had stepped into a sanctuary, but could not pray. That woman was . . . . . and I worshipped her from that moment. When they locked me in again, I took the flower from my dress, and forgot where I was; the flood gates were loosed, and I was given—one of the few things they can't take away from us,—sleep! That is the curious part of it. We suffer all the untold agonies of mind, and then we sleep, and sometimes dream of daisy fields. But now the situation is reversed. I sleep and

dream that I am back again, and trying to get out. I wake myself up trying to scream, and in those few moments I live all over again the past horror and hopelessness. The very sight of a cot bed turns me sick, — its shape and width suggest so much.

I believe I said I was joyous. This does not sound much like it. Still I am.

Am so glad to have Henley's book to browse over at odd moments.

\* \* \* \*

Thanks for the little Brownie photograph. To think that I have been acquainted with myself so long, and didn't really know until now just how I looked! I shall take your advice and send it to my mother. If anything serious happens, please take the blame. You must not pay any attention to what I say in this letter, for I have soared so high today, that I have ridden on the tip end of a cloud; and such a sunset! A blood red sun in an opal sky, and all reflected in a still river of molten silver. No artist could ever paint it. What an artist God must be! No two sunsets alike, infinite variety, each succeeding night more beautiful than the last! I love it, and revel in it, but find words too common and gross to express the beauty of it all.

I am glad that you are satisfied with my work. I have never spoken of being tired of late. I am hardening up, and then the work is divided more evenly. I want to do the best I can here, and I think you believe me. They seem to understand me better, and we are on a much more pleasant footing. I am now more my natural self with them, and they laugh with me, and not at me, which is, of course, very nice of them.

Now about your letters. They give me a great brace; they help me every time. It is a very wonderful thing to understand. What you said of Mr. . . . . . was perfectly right; a good, helpful comrade is what he has always been, clear sighted, clean minded, and a fine man all round. I am proud to call him a friend.

What you say in reference to my mother I know to be perfectly true. I thank you for putting it so plainly, for I needed to hear it in just such words. I am glad, too, that you like my verses; *but if you didn't know the circumstances, would you still like them?* I know they are not wonderful, by any means. If I thought I should some day actually see them in print, in a little house all their own, I would stretch up on my intellectual tiptoes until I did something worth while. When you find me faulty in my grammar, I wish

you would speak of it. Don't let me cut my verbs, like "I'm going", or "I'd rather". I try very hard about that.

I am somewhat low-spirited tonight. I wish I had a home of my own to go to, so that I would not have to give you all this bother.

This is written Sunday evening upon my return from . . . . . where I was a guest at a Biblical play given in the woods; beautiful indeed, but given literally. It was very wonderful to see the children and young people so entirely free from self-consciousness.

\* \* \* \*

At last I have found a place. I am to start work this afternoon at 2.30, and work until 10 o'clock tonight at the munitions factory. This is the place I spoke of to you, and although it is a *dump*, it will help a great deal at the present time. I cannot sit down like Mr. Micawber, and wait for something to turn up. I only hope that I may be able to stand it. It is horribly dirty, I am told, but the money is clean. It is a place of nations, for all sorts of foreigners are working there. It is like having one's soul hit with a knout to have to go to such a dreary place, away from the sunshine, but we cannot have all we like in this life, and I doubt if it would be good for us if we did.

I took lunch Friday with . . . . . and we talked over some sketches. I am very keen about them, and shall go ahead, for I have my mornings free, and am on my first one. I am inclined to write it story style, which I wish I could change. It does not seem true enough, written that way.

Well, I'm off to help blow up the Germans — if I don't get blown up myself first. Are you still of the same mind about the poems? I hope so — oh, so much!

I wish I could thank you in the way I wish.

\* \* \* \*

Here I am again. This time I simply had to write to you to tell you what I am up against. Before I went to the new job, which is making shells for the British Government, I heard reports that the plant was threatened, and that it was to be demolished sometime this week. I couldn't make up my mind which was the worse; being blown up by dynamite, or being blown up by an irate landlady!

But I went in at half past two. Ye gods! What a place! No brains are necessary, just brawn. We work seven and a half hours, with fifteen minutes for lunch! . . . Every moment, at some unexpected noise, the girls will scream, and all lights outside are kept

burning, and an extra force of guards patrols the building. The war never seemed so real. It is like working on the top of a rumbling volcano.

The accommodations for the women are indescribable, and *this* in cultured Massachusetts. The firm holds back three days from my pay, which is another bad feature. The only good feature about the whole affair, is that if I do get blown up, my remains will be so scattered that my loving family will be spared the expense of my burial.

Our clothes are intermingled in an unkempt mass and the odors are something weird. However, one must live, and as long as there are no other places for girls, some one is ever ready to take the risk, like

Yours sincerely,

\* \* \* \*

. . . I shall be all right after pay day next Wednesday, I think, and can struggle along till then.

My new room is a thing of beauty, and let us hope it will be a joy forever. I know that I shall appreciate it more with a full stomach. Science has yet to discover how one can live on sixty-two cents for a week, and still be optimistic and retain their sense of humor.

Some day I shall look back on this experience as a huge joke, but at the present time there is nothing humorous about it.

We were told in the shop last night that we could go home at eight o'clock, as there was no work. But I stayed and wore the varnish off the firm's chair, for thirty-two cents is not to be sneezed at. I'm off now for a good square meal.

The girl next to me, who is quite a character, tells me that the reason she has no "steady", is because the one she would have won't have her, and the one that would have her the devil wouldn't have. Concise, isn't it?

\* \* \* \*

. . . The munition work goes merrily on, and each night I discover some new noise to add to the torture. All the sins I ever committed really should be washed from the slate, for this work is penance. When you step into that filthy place, reeking of lard oil, and the bell rings that starts that long line all working together like a machine, I feel like hammering on the closed door, and getting out somehow; but then the hot wave of anger gradually dies when you wonder how long it would be before you found another place, and you feel rather ashamed that you

have rebelled even inwardly at conditions that seem to your co-workers perfectly satisfactory.

Ah, the man that wrote "Where ignorance is bliss" knew human nature, didn't he? The girl next to me had half a chicken for her lunch yesterday, and she confided in me, saying that "the guy-she-was-keeping-company-with knew the chef at the . . . . . Hotel, who swiped half a broiled chicken for him every once in a while, and her steady passed it along to her." That poor chicken! What travels! Where he might have been served on a silver platter to some fastidious guest, he is instead toted around in the "steady's" pocket, to end ignominiously as the *piece de resistance* of a cold lunch in a Munitions Factory. That chicken must have led a very sinful life, brief as it was, to have to suffer such a fate.

Thanks be that today is Friday, for I detest night work, and I am next door to being broke, which of late seems to be a chronic state with me.

I figured up last week and found that I spent more for carfares and accessories, than I did for what I ate. If I tide over this week I think I shall be all right. Next Wednesday I shall be able to eat properly.

Did I thank you for all your trouble? No, I never do. It makes me sort of ache, you

are so good to me. Why is it? I have often wanted to ask you, but hesitate, for fear it might be as I surmised.

. \* \* \* \*

The . . . . . employment bureau sent me to . . . . . store. Eight dollars was the sky limit. One sixth came out each week for the employment people, which left \$6.66; carfares 60 cents, and lunches 60 cents, room rent \$3.00, left me \$2.46 to eat, dress and pay for laundry. I backed down and went to the shell game in the afternoon. I am afraid it is all up with me there, for I was put on fine work that I could hardly see, the light on the brass was so trying. . . . Forgive this scrawl. After four weeks of factory work, my hand is again like a pig's foot, and I am in an awful mood, for I hate that place so, and its beastly hours. This business is making a first-class cynic of me. When the spirit moves you, remember,

Yours sincerely,

\* \* \* \*

. . . . . writes that she hopes I will some day give up concealment, and let my past be known — "face it publicly," she says;

— and she adds that there is a great buoyancy and strength which comes from it, which kills cheap gossip, and strengthens friendships.

Very likely she is right. But if I was big enough to face my past, the world isn't big enough to face it, — nor to give me a future. Think how long I would last in a place if my employer knew. Even if the head of a firm knew, and kept me, others would get together and see that I was discharged. Only those who have friends and money behind them, can afford to walk erect — as I wish I could do.

No matter how short the sentence, your time is never done until your name is erased from the book of Life. You go through the door of the great prison, and you say "I am free." But you lie to yourself! For in the sight of man, when he knows, you are two persons, — the person you are today, and the person you were. It doesn't make any difference how honest you may be, — *you are not to be trusted.*

And so you find, in time, that you lack confidence in yourself. And always at your elbow stalks Fear. You even dream about it. When a prisoner has been told just what to do for nearly two years, when every movement has been directed by an officer, she becomes accustomed to it, and becomes a sort of

machine, and when she goes out into the world she is left helpless in many ways. She has not been accustomed to take the initiative, and it is a great while before she dares to take that liberty again.

Then the look! Did I ever tell you that when a person stops in the middle of a conversation and looks at me steadily, or when I find a person looking at me whom I don't know, I grow cold? My brain hammers out, "*They know*," and when an unkind word is said, or someone slights me, the S. O. S. signals, "*They know*." If it was not for my mother, I would stand up to some of these holier-than-thou people, and say, "*Yes, it is so*." But my mother is old, and I can't rob her of her dearest possession, Pride.

How did this all start? Oh yes; . . . . . 's letter. Well, you see I am moody tonight. I and myself are sick of each other's company. That wonderful courage you have spoken of is gone. I am sick and tired of everything, and what adds to my grief is the fact that the woman downstairs has departed, and taken her cat with her. And sometimes I felt sure that that cat liked me.

I bore you? I know it; I bore myself.

## THE SONG OF THE FUSE

FASHIONED was I by the hands of a  
woman;

Circumstance willed it, she bore men no ill;  
Shaped for my work by a hand soft and tender;  
'My work' you ask me?—my work is to kill.

I do not wait till I reach the far war field,  
To start my fell art of the killing of men;  
But there in the grime and the stench of the  
work shop,  
I murder the souls of my makers, — and then,

I fill them with fear and unspeakable horror;  
For guarded am I as a king's royal head:  
*They* risk their lives through the black nights  
of terror,  
(One cannot choose when the body needs  
bread.)

Young eyes grow bold with an unholy wisdom;  
Soft lips learn curses, that once breathed a  
prayer:

“Merry my work”? — Another has fainted!  
Fill her place quickly! — In war, all is fair!

Do ye not know that this hot haste breeds  
wisdom

That leads to the devil, the street and the  
cell?

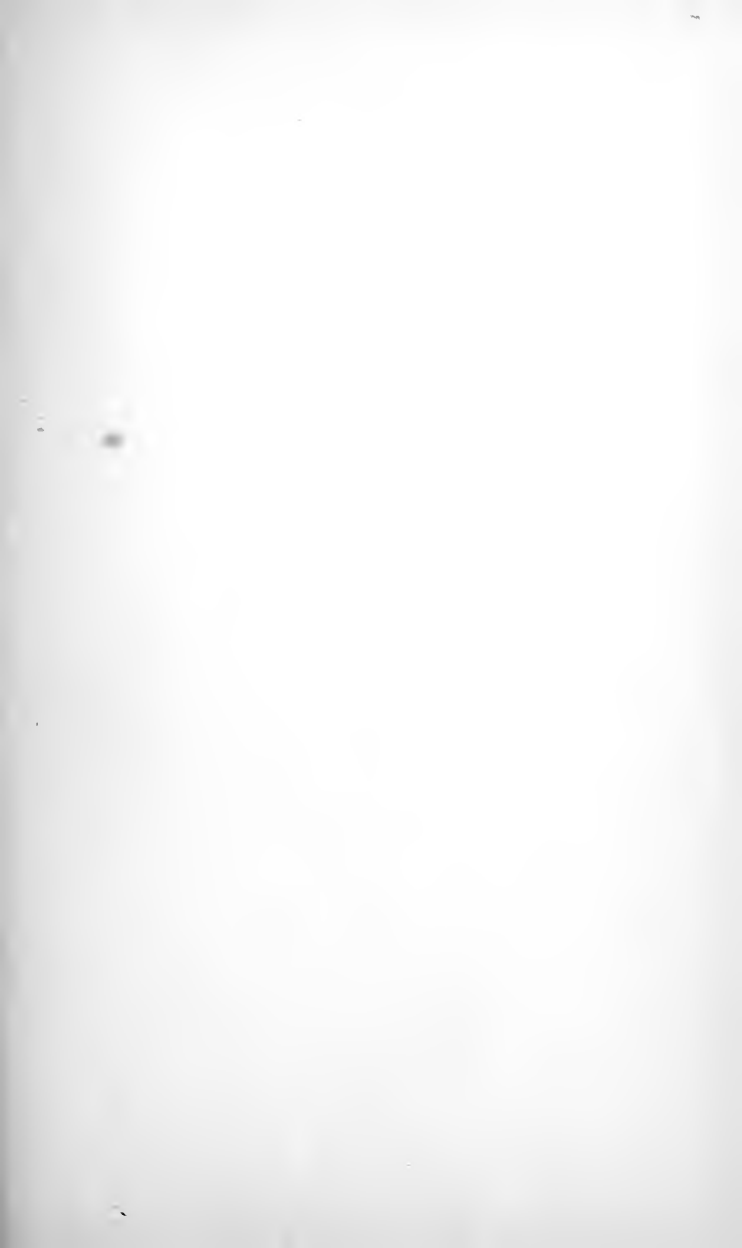
Fitting my birth in such poisonous caldron;  
My work is to kill, and I do my work well!

Aye, give your aid to the men who in battle  
Die from my kisses; but leave me those still  
Who in the workshop die slowly, but surely;  
Truly, my work is to kill, — and to kill!



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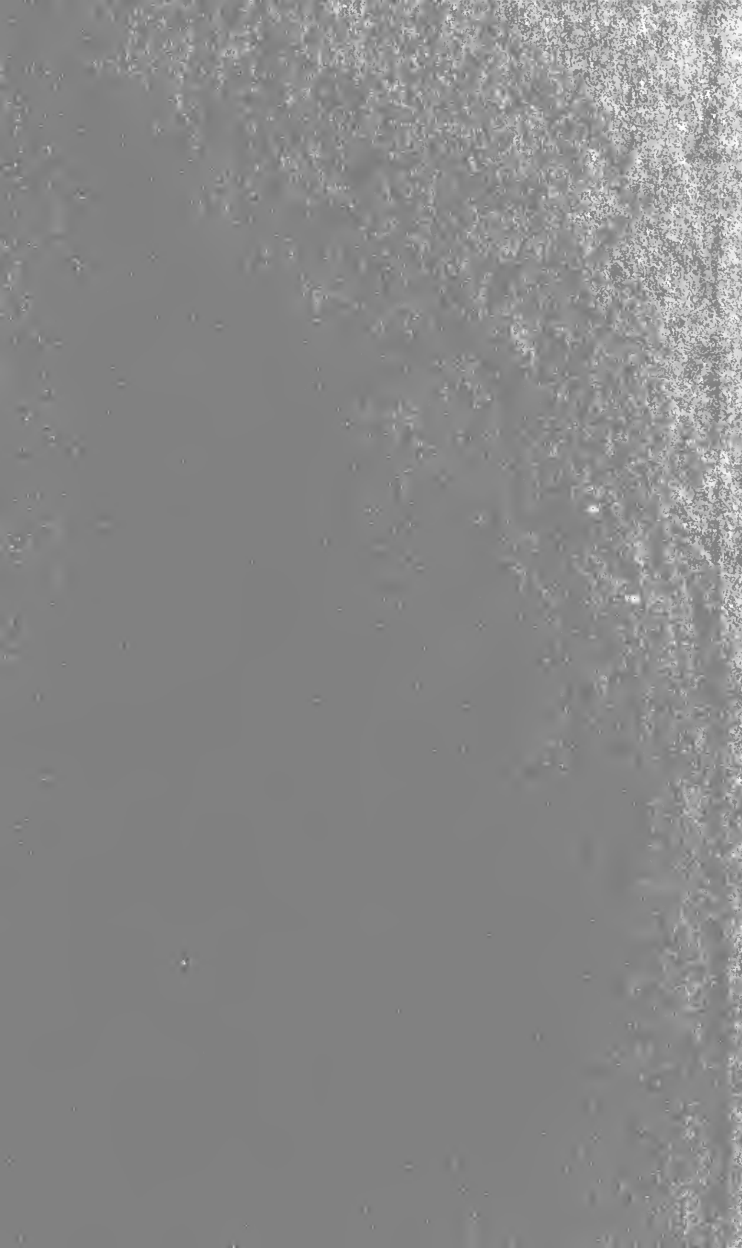
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